Chagall

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

THIS LITTLE BOOK is a happy review of the painting and graphic art of one of the best-loved of modern painters. Marc Chagall's color, his unique, fresh, and uninhibited way of seeing, and his willingness to paint as though he took mankind's metaphors and figures of speech very literally—all these have given him a special place in the art of our century. Twenty-eight pages of color plates present Chagall's work, from very early pieces to the present. In addition, a striking selection of the artist's etchings, lithographs, and stage designs, reproduced in duotone, underlines Chagall's great importance as a graphic artist. The author, Miss Emily Genauer, is the highly esteemed art critic of the New York Herald Tribune, and a long-time friend of the painter.

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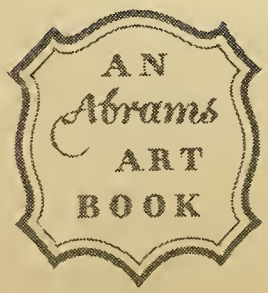

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Plate 1. MARC CHAGALL

MARC

CHAGALL

(born 1889)

text by

EMILY GENAUER

Critic and Art Editor
The New York Herald-Tribune

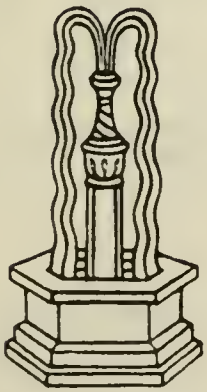

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Plate 2. STUDY FOR MURAL IN JEWISH ART THEATER, MOSCOW, *1919*

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On the cover

I AND THE VILLAGE

(see color plate 10)

MILTON S. FOX, Editor.

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Drawing and water color. Collection of the artist, Vence

Marc Chagall

Marc Chagall, almost alone among the great artists of the twentieth century, has been without imitators or disciples. His brilliantly colored paintings of enraptured lovers floating through the air in tender embrace, of lush bouquets looming taller than tree-tops, of bemused fiddlers, winged clocks, and dancing roosters, are so uniquely and

thoroughly an expression of his own temperament, experience, and background that no other painter can "borrow" them without embarrassingly proclaiming his debt.

If Chagall defies imitation, he defies classification, too. He has been called a Surrealist, because his whimsical figures and animals and his topsy-turvy buildings, would seem to be the poetic, symbolic creations of infinite fancy and improbable dream. But the gentle, shy sixty-five-year-old painter maintains stoutly that "I am against the terms 'fantasy' and 'symbolism.' Our inner world is reality—perhaps more real than the apparent world . . ."

He has also been called a primitive, because of the deceptive naiveté of his pictures, their lack of conventional perspective and proportion, the childlike ingenuousness with which he paints cows jumping over the moon, fish zooming through space. But Chagall's approach is anything but primitive. He is an ardent admirer of the great art of the past, feels that the yearning of many artists for what he calls "an innocent, newborn language" is both futile and tragic.

He has been called an Expressionist because he celebrates feeling in his pictures, sacrificing both the reality of the everyday world and, seemingly, the classic rules of formal composition, to his need to communicate intense emotion. But he insists that for him actually, "The visual effect of the composition is paramount . . . For me a picture is a surface covered with representations of things in a certain order . . . In the case of the headless woman with the milk pails in one of my pictures, painted in 1910—11, it occurred to me to separate her head from her body because I found I needed an empty space in that particular place . . ."

Can Chagall, then, be called an abstractionist concerned principally with painting shapes in certain arresting relationships? No, because that kind of painting he holds to be more ornamental than creative, a matter of taste, not art.

Plate 3. MY LIFE: GRANDFATHER'S HOUSE. *1922. Drypoint,* $8^{3}/_{16} \times 6^{1}/_{4}$"

Plate 4. MY LIFE: FATHER. *1922. Drypoint, 10⅞ x 8½"*

Plate 5. THE ARTIST'S WIFE. *1925*
Drypoint, 8¾ x 4⁹/₁₆″

Chagall may be said truthfully to be of no school at all but the School of Paris, which does not describe his painting manner but simply places him geographically in a climate that over the past hundred years has been especially favorable to the growth of what we now know as modern art.

He found his way there from his native Vitebsk in Russia, when he was twenty, coming by way of two years' study in Petrograd. Before leaving Russia, however, he had absorbed visual memories of its life, character, and architecture so vivid they would never thereafter be absent from his pictures. More important, he had evolved an approach to life that profoundly affected his art.

He was born on July 7, 1889, of a poor family whose ten children were meagerly supported by his father's toil in a fish market and his mother's operating a small grocery store. But if his physical surroundings were poor, his heritage was rich. Into it went the memories of a large, lively family not only of brothers and sisters but also of fiddle-playing uncles and an eccentric grandfather (one of Chagall's early drawings portrays him perched on the chimney of his house enjoying the evening breezes and a dish of dessert); a vast body of colorful folklore and legend; a traditional love of learning based primarily on the Bible, and its endless convoluted rabbinical interpretations. But one of the most important elements in Chagall's background was the impact of his imagination of the Hasidim, a Jewish mystical sect of which his fiddler uncle was a member, and which held that communion between God and man is achieved through exultant joyous feeling, not through asceticism or intellectualism.

It was this tempering of rabbinical rationalization with ecstatic feeling which enabled the young Chagall to escape, via his pen and pencil, from the wretched poverty of his environment into an imaginary world where religious ritual

Plate 6. MY LIFE: THE GRANDFATHERS. *1922. Drypoint, 10⅞ x 8½"*

and the rhetorical images of the Scriptures took on the concrete form of reality.

The intensity of his feeling enabled him to withstand three stultifying months in a Vitebsk art school, a brief apprenticeship to a photographer, two years of study at an inferior, academic art school in Petrograd, a stint in a sign-painter's shop, and a short period in the studio of Leon Bakst, a painter and scenarist who at least encouraged experimentation with the new aesthetic ideas filtering into Russia from Paris.

It was a mixture of rationalization with emotional ecstasy which enabled Chagall, after he arrived in 1910 in a Paris seething with aesthetic ferment, to absorb and profit from the revolutionary technical researches going on about him, yet at the same time to hold steadfast, with a grip made stronger by nostalgia, to the emotional, poetic subject matter he had made his own back in Vitebsk.

Chagall had not come to Paris directly from Petrograd. He returned after two years to Vitebsk and began the first of the paintings which today are counted significant in his development. In them we find the themes which would recur throughout his career—peasants, funerals, street sweepers, marriage ceremonies—and Bella, the Vitebsk girl he would marry six years later and whose face would appear in so many of his pictures thereafter, that all his work has been called a hymn to the pair's great love. It was her portrait, the unsmiling *Portrait of My Fiancée in Black Gloves* (plate 9), that Chagall carried back with him to Petrograd where a wealthy patron, in exchange for six pictures, consented to send him to Paris on a small, monthly allowance.

In Paris, at the age of twenty, Chagall says, "I was born again." A fledgling artist could not have picked a better "second birth place" than the Paris of 1910. It was the headquarters of the men who were to become the giants of

Plate 7. MY LIFE: HOUSE IN PESHOWATILE. *1922. Drypoint, 7 x 8¼"*

modernism, among them such diverse talents as Matisse, Picasso, Modigliani, Léger, Braque, Gris.

The nineteenth-century masters, Renoir and Degas, though aged and ill, were still painting. Cézanne, dead since 1906, was beginning to win his long overdue recognition. The Fauves, or "wild beasts," had just finished their brief and lively fling with color. The Cubists were busily splintering and reconstructing form. Painters were steadily becoming less and less concerned with *what* they painted, and more and more with *how*. Intensity of feeling and the poetic expression of that feeling seemed to have no place on the scene at all.

In such an environment Chagall was spiritually as well as physically far from home. "I returned in thought, in the soul, so to speak, to my own country," he later said, describing those early years. But he painted his homesick memories of Vitebsk with a new freshness and vibrancy of color, a new awareness of the architecture of composition. These he learned in Paris, from the light and life of her streets, from the masterpieces in and out of her museums, from his contacts with the trail-blazing artists who were his friends and neighbors in the odd wooden honey comb building called "The Beehive" where he set up his studio. The results were hailed by his friends among the avant-garde poets as the restoration of poetry to painting. This small but enthusiastic audience induced a German editor to arrange a one-man show for him, his first, hung in Berlin on the eve of World War I.

Chagall went to Berlin for the opening of that show, remaining nine months, then returned to Vitebsk for a visit. The outbreak of war kept him there eight years. Not until 1922 did he make his way again to Paris.

There were other travels all over Europe, to the Near East, and eventually, in 1941, to New York, where the artist and his family came to find refuge during World

Plate 8. NUDE WITH FAN. *1924–25. Etching, 8½ x 10*$^{15}/_{16}$″

War II. Always he carried with him the image of the world he had absorbed back in Vitebsk. Nor did his technique change radically. Rather did it show steady enrichment. His color became ever more dazzling, his compositions freer.

Chagall—now once again back in France—still paints fiddlers and flowers in the sky. And while their defiance of the laws of gravity and logic are still confusing and upsetting to many persons, his great international audience of long-time admirers is being augmented by countless thousands willing to accept the idea that imaginative imagery has surely as much right in painting as in writing, that the painter is as justified in portraying happy lovers walking on air as we are in describing them so in everyday speech, that a winged clock is no more far-fetched than our phrase "time flies," and that Chagall, perhaps more than any other painter of our time—giving wing to lovers, bouquets, musicians, clocks, cows, and candlesticks—has also given wing to our own imagination.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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COLOR PLATES

PLATE 9

Painted 1909

PORTRAIT OF MY FIANCÉE IN BLACK GLOVES

Öffentliche Kunstsammlung, Kunstmuseum, Basel
34¾ x 25¼"

On his return to Vitebsk after two years' struggle as an art student in Petrograd, Chagall, at nineteen, painted his first serious pictures. They were serious not only in that they show the first signs of a very considerable talent, but also in theme. Through these studies of provincial weddings and funerals, village streets, peasants, and animals (a far cry from the subjects which had been approved in the hothouse academies he had left behind in the capital) runs an undercurrent of sadness, perhaps inescapable for a young and sensitive boy who had grown up in the desperately poor Jewish quarter of a Russia still ridden by pogroms and persecution. Even this straightforward, naturalistic *Portrait of My Fiancée in Black Gloves* is unsmiling, and darker in tone than his later work. It is still almost gay in comparison with the somber subject matter and palette of other paintings of this early Vitebsk period. Its subject is the young Vitebsk girl who became the painter's bride in 1915 and inspired many of his paintings. It is interesting to note how, in this early work, Chagall solved technical problems by the simplest possible means, starting with the contrast of the white dress against the dark background, and of the black gloves against the white dress. The cap, the long tresses, the face, the leaves, the book are all painted in their natural colors, with barely a hint of the complex tonalities and almost encrusted surface which would characterize Chagall's work of the future. A foretaste of the colorful, decorative motifs to come may be found, however, in floral notes in left and right corners.

PLATE 10

Painted 1911

I AND THE VILLAGE

The Museum of Modern Art, New York
(Mrs. Simon Guggenheim Fund)
75⅝ x 59⅝"

In Paris, where he arrived in the spring of 1910, Chagall was fascinated by the light and the life of the city, by the richness of its museums (where he especially admired such masters as Rembrandt, Titian, Giorgione, Goya, El Greco, Delacroix, Chardin, Poussin) but, most of all, by the technical experiments of young, avant-garde artists. Yet his theme, by and large, remained Vitebsk. Here, in one of his early masterpieces, may be seen his old love transformed by his new vision. The composition is essentially an arrangement of circles and triangles, related certainly to the geometric forms of the Cubists, but larger in scale and more two-dimensional than three. The large circle at the center of the picture is echoed round about by smaller circles, as in the clouds and the eyes. The triangle formed by the upward thrust of the sprig of flowers is met by the downward force of an inverted triangle formed by the cow's muzzle and the man's nose. The intensity of the colors, their arbitrary use (as in the green face), and the strokes of paint on top of the cow's head in the upper left corner, recall the contemporary experiments of the Fauves. But the peasant woman and two houses painted upside down, and the milking scene inside the cow's head—these are pure Chagall. Why did he paint such "affronts" to logic? For what to him was the most logical reason in the world. "In my painting *I and the Village*," he says, "I painted a small cow and a milkmaid in the head of a large cow because I needed that kind of shape in that place for my composition."

PLATE 11

Painted 1912

CALVARY

The Museum of Modern Art, New York
(Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest)
68¾ x 75¾"

Vitebsk was for the moment forgotten when Chagall turned, in this canvas of his early Paris period, to the traditional theme of Calvary. Perhaps he was still remembering, however, his interest in Russian icons. In any case, it is fused here with the compositional approach of the Cubists. Circles, triangles, squares are held together in this picture by large, loosely contained fields of color. But in the folds of the garments on the two figures at the foot of the Cross, we note that Chagall's contrasts have become less the simple light-against-dark drawing device he employed in earlier paintings *(Portrait of My Fiancée,* plate 9, for example). Now it involves new subtleties of tone and texture—in short, it has become more painterly. Despite the prevalence of bright primary colors, and the fanciful floral designs that appear even on the loincloth of the crucified Christ, the overall mood is plainly one of sorrow and tragedy. Chagall achieved this effect partly by his sinister, sharp-pointed figurations of black and Prussian blue around the central tableau. Later, in the years just before World War II, Chagall, troubled by the Nazi persecutions of Jews, returned again and again to the Crucifixion theme in his pictures. Christ, he has said, has always been to him "a great poet whose poetical teaching has been forgotten by the modern world."

Plate 12. THE WEDDING

(commentary follows color plate section)

PLATE 14

Painted 1913

PREGNANT WOMAN

Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
(Collection P. A. Regnault)
76⅜ x 45⅞"

For people who argue that Chagall's painting derives from icons and Russian folk art, this painting might serve as Exhibit A. The woman, from the way she is delineated and the way she is placed in the picture, immediately brings to mind the treatment of the Virgin in many Byzantine icons. At the same time the flowers on her skirt suggest peasant decorations. The idea of being able to see the child within the mother's body is also one that can be found in the primitive art of earlier periods, and, in fact, in many icons. To present day gallery-goers it will recall similar idioms in the hollowed-out figures of such younger men than Chagall as Salvador Dali and Henry Moore. At any rate, it is fancies like this X-ray view of the baby, as well as the head looming over the houses in the lower right and the goat sailing over the clouds, that has caused Chagall to be sometimes classified as a Surrealist. There are, however, still strong evidences of Cubist influences in this Paris painting—for example, the breaking up of the space surrounding the central figure with geometric shapes.

PLATE 15

Painted 1914

PRAYING JEW

The Art Institute of Chicago
(The Joseph Winterbotham Collection)
46 x 35"

Back in Vitebsk, Chagall once more turned to painting the scenes and people around him—his family and the townspeople. He hired a beggar (as Rembrandt did on occasion) to be his model for this picture. From the point of view of design it is one of Chagall's most solidly organized compositions. It is immediately apparent that in Vitebsk, working directly from life, the artist was more literal than in Paris where he conjured up Vitebsk from memories. Yet when we examine what at first strikes us as a very "real" portrait, we find evidences of Cubism throughout. Perhaps the most interesting thing about this painting, however, is that Chagall, who generally gives his work emotional impact with brilliant masses of color, here gets his effect by employing large areas of black and white, and by emphasis on the nervous linear patterns, as in the emphasized black straps of the phylactory bound to the arm at right, the black stripes of the prayer shawl, its saw-toothed edge, and the repetition of the traditional curls of hair at each temple, in the curious curl of the dark background above his shoulder at the left. The somber palette, the agitated patterns, and the hunched attitude of the figure, all convey the feelings of an intense and sorrowing man in agonized communion with his God.

PLATE 16

Painted 1917

THE GATES TO THE CEMETERY

Collection Mme. Meyer-Chagall, Paris
34¾ x 27¼"

With World War I raging through Europe, Chagall stayed on in Russia after his marriage to Bella, instead of taking his bride back to Paris. He was called up for military service right after the wedding, but ended up in a rear echelon job in Petrograd where he continued to paint in off-duty hours. In 1917, the year Russia was torn by revolution, Chagall returned to Vitebsk as Minister of Art for the town, and founded a school. During this period he painted a number of landscapes that demonstrated his technical virtuosity in this genre. It is not surprising that in such troubled times Chagall should have been deeply concerned again with death, and that among the landscapes are paintings of cemeteries. In this picture of the cemetery gates, the angular geometry of his Paris work is back in full force, only now, instead of being used arbitrarily as abstract design, it bears resemblance to rays of light—dancing in atmosphere, bounding off reflecting surfaces, and casting long shadows. The Hebrew characters on the gate remind us that while Chagall was a teen-age art student in Petrograd, he had also worked briefly in a sign painter's shop.

PLATES 17 & 18

Painted 1915–23

BIRTHDAY

The Museum of Modern Art, New York
(Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest)
31⅞ x 39⅜"

In 1914 Chagall's first one-man show was hung in the offices of the review *Der Sturm* in Berlin. He visited the German capital for the opening of the exhibition, then went on to Vitebsk to marry his fiancée Bella, reaching home only a few weeks before the outbreak of World War I. On his birthday in 1915, shortly before their wedding, Bella gave Chagall a bouquet of flowers, and he painted this picture to commemorate the event. It is interesting to see in this work that with his return to Vitebsk there is also a return to a more literal perspective than that of the Paris paintings. He does not return, however, to the somber palette of his early Vitebsk period. The colors are light and brilliant, as in Paris. Note though, that the large color areas here are not free-sweeping masses, broken up with abstract geometry, but representational color used to define specific objects, like the red floor and the white walls. The result is a solid little room which underscores the romantic lyricism of the floating lovers. Bella Chagall describes, in her autobiography, the afternoon on which the picture was painted, and the happiness of the young couple: ". . . we lifted ourselves easily—together—above the decorated room and floated; we came to the window and wanted to push through. From the window the light clouds were calling us, and a patch of blue sky.... The walls and the colored shawls began to whirl around us and made us dizzy. We flew over meadows filled with flowers, over sleeping houses, roofs, yards, churches...."

ENTIRE PAINTING ABOVE

← LIFT FOLD FOR DETAIL

PLATES 17 & 18

Painted 1915–23

BIRTHDAY

The Museum of Modern Art, New York
(Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest)
31⅞ × 39⅜″

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PLATE 19

Painted 1917

SELF-PORTRAIT WITH WINEGLASS

Museum of Modern Art, Paris
92½ x 54″

Starting with the *Birthday* of 1915 (plates 17 & 18), Chagall's work echoes with many paeans, like this double portrait of himself and Bella with their young child floating overhead, celebrating the joys of their domestic life. (Could the curious composition have had its origin, as has been suggested, in a common Yiddish phrase which says of a happy and devoted wife and her husband that "she carries him on her hands?") In this painting and similar ones of the period, from which traces of Cubism have all but disappeared, the couple are recognizably the artist and his wife, but in later pictures the bridal couples and lovers floating through the air become generalized, and the literal identity is subordinated to a poetic universe. To Chagall a bride is always Bella, but the viewer sees in the later pictures all brides and all lovers. At the bottom of this picture is a sample of the deft landscapes Chagall produced in 1917—in this case, a view of Vitebsk astride the Dvina River. In that same year he did curtain designs and a stage set for a Gogol revival in Petrograd. In 1919 he left Vitebsk for Moscow where he continued his theatrical work with murals for the State Jewish Theater and settings for *The Dybbuk, The Playboy of the Western World,* and three Sholom Aleichem plays. Though the war in Europe ended in 1919, it was not until 1922 that Chagall was able to get a permit to take his wife and daughter out of the Soviet Union and return to Paris.

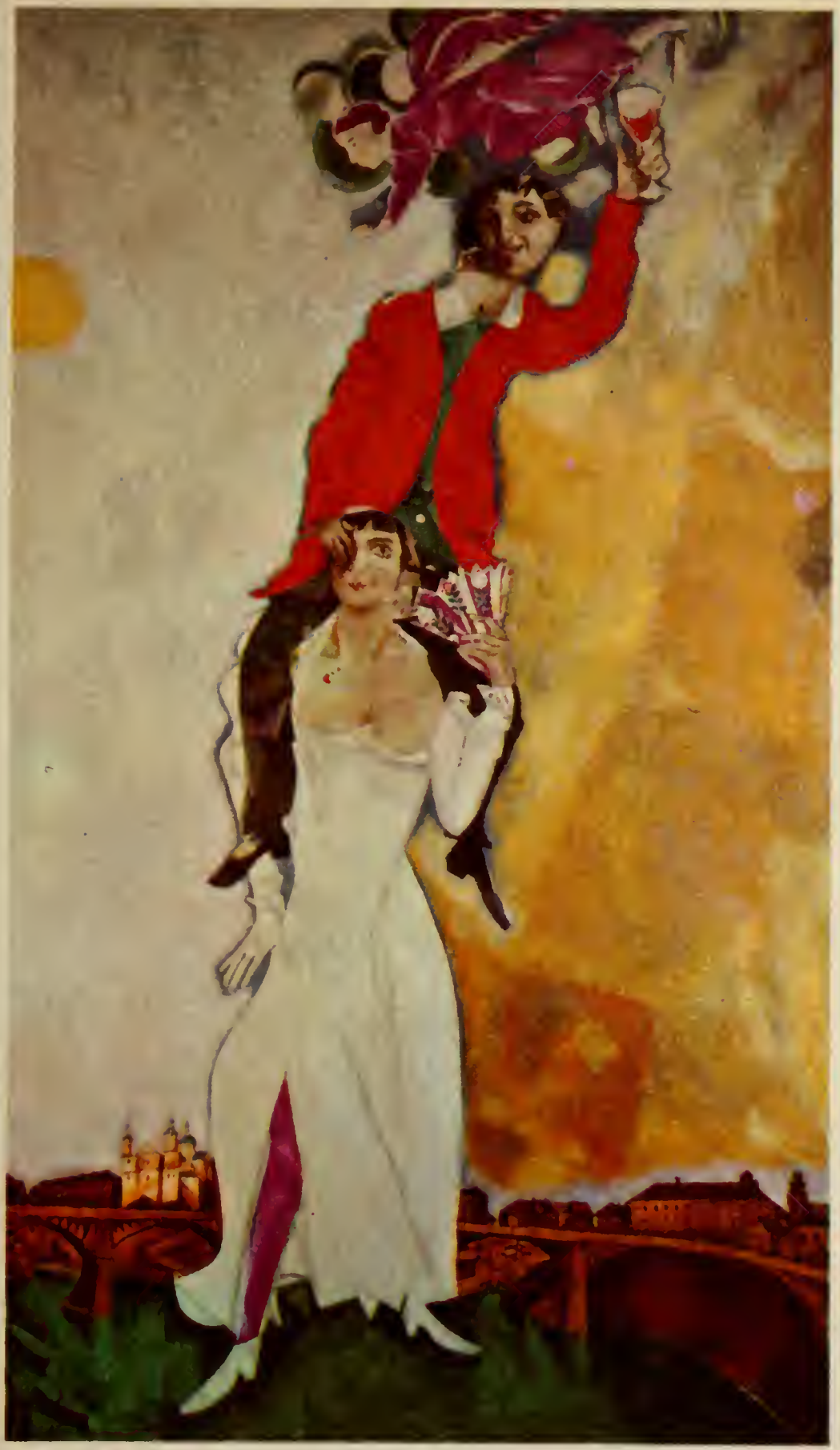

PLATE 20

Painted 1924

DAUGHTER OF THE ARTIST IN THE WINDOW

Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
(Collection P. A. Regnault)
41 x 39⅝"

This delicately tinted portrait of Ida Chagall as a young girl is a departure from the fantasy which is generally associated with the artist's manner. There is no allusion to Vitebsk, or to the Cubist influences, which up to now had figured so prominently in his pictures. Nor does he here flout the laws of gravity and perspective. Yet, though it is an atypical work, this picture should hold no surprises for us, for in it we still find elements of the painter's virtuosity that we noted earlier. There is the mastery of landscape, now capturing the French countryside. There is the interest in floral arrangements, beautifully manifest in the vase of flowers. There is the delineation of forms through color gradations with little resort to defining lines. What is new is a softening of the color areas. This came about when a deeper interest in tonal and textural qualities took hold of him on his return to France from Russia. The total effect, however, is a simplicity appropriate to a little girl's picture.

PLATES 21 & 22

Painted 1931

LOVERS IN THE LILACS

Collection Richard S. Zeisler, New York
51 x 35"

While the picture in the preceding color plate was a departure from the artist's familiar style of the twenties, this one is typical of his mature manner of the thirties. No one with the barest acquaintance with his work would have to look for the signature to identify the painting as Chagall's. It is a work of singular beauty, both in its technical accomplishment and in its poetic overtones. Flowers, which appeared in his earliest paintings as small decorative notes and in the 1924 portrait of his daughter as an incidental still life, here dominate the landscape and serve as a nest for the lovers. The paint surface reveals great subtleties of color and texture (see detail, plate 22), especially in the rendering of the bouquet. It is the pervasive bluish tonality, however, that establishes the romantic mood of the picture, and it might be said that Chagall here accomplished with moonbeams what the Impressionists did with sunlight.

ENTIRE PAINTING ABOVE

← LIFT FOLD FOR DETAIL

PLATES 21 & 22

Painted 1931

LOVERS IN THE LILACS

Collection Richard S. Zeisler, New York
51 x 35″

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PLATE 23

Painted 1930–39

TIME IS A RIVER WITHOUT BANKS

The Museum of Modern Art, New York
39⅜ x 32″

The title of this painting, paraphrasing a metaphor that can be traced back to Ovid, illustrates the affinity between Chagall's pictorial conceptions and poetry. In time, composition, and palette, this painting is related to the *Lovers in the Lilacs* (plate 21). Like the bouquet, the big elements of this picture—the fish and the clock—are set against a blue-suffused riverscape. Only here we find nostalgic recollections of home in Vitebsk—the winged fish, Uncle Neuch's violin, the old family pendulum clock. Chagall leaves us to speculate about the fish. Its fiery wings, its feathered tail, suggest it derives from the firebird and the goldfish of Russian fairy tales. It could, however, be reminiscent of the fish market where the artist's father worked. Or is could simply be a form that filled the painter's compositional needs. But the title leaves us in doubt about the meaning of the clock. There may be a significance in the dates on this painting, too. For 1930, when the picture was started, was ten years after Chagall left Vitebsk; in 1939, when it was finished, he was nearly twenty years further along the onflowing bankless river of his life.

PLATE 24

Painted 1938–39

THE BRIDE AND GROOM OF THE EIFFEL TOWER

Collection of the artist, Vence
58¾ x 54⅛"

Again the bride and bridegroom—Bella and Chagall. The likenesses are plain enough, but so there shall be no mistaking the identity, there is a "flashback" to Vitebsk, at left, showing them standing beneath the bridal canopy some fourteen years before this painting was done. And throughout the painting is a whole catalogue of Vitebsk memories—the cluster of wooden houses at the lower right, everywhere animals and angels, candlesticks and fiddles, a schoolboy with his book. There is also the tower of the title, done as a solid blue silhouette instead of the open spiderweb of steel that it really is Chagall used the Eiffel Tower, a symbol no one could fail to recognize, to put the stamp of Paris on a number of his early paintings—*Paris Through the Window,* 1913; *Homage to the Eiffel Tower,* 1928; and this *Bride and Groom.* But he did not paint the Paris scene as he did Vitebsk in the masterful landscapes of 1915 to 1922. For, as he himself explains: "There was no question of sentiment in my discovery of Paris as a city at a time when I had just left my native land." He had come to see with his own eyes what he called the "visual revolution" being fought by modern artists. What he found was not only the effects of that revolution, but what he considers its cause—the *"lumière-liberté"* or "light of freedom" which I had seen nowhere else." Not till fifteen years after this picture was done did Parisian landmarks other than the Eiffel Tower appear in his paintings—when at last he saw Paris as a city rather than a beacon.

PLATES 25 & 26

Painted 1933–44

TO MY WIFE

Museum of Modern Art, Paris
51 x 77″

This large canvas, eleven years in the painting, was brought to completion after Bella Chagall's death in the fall of 1944. It is the artist's great tribute to Bella and their happy life together, here, in a manner of speaking, summarized. Into it he brought all the familiar elements—birds, flowers, fiddlers, candlesticks, goats, flying clocks, the houses of Vitebsk. Dominating all are the pair under the wedding canopy, the resplendent nude figure on a red coverlet, and the sorrowing angel at the left. One of the most interesting facets of this complex painting is the bouquet beside the nude. In comparison with the similar bouquet in *Lovers in the Lilacs* (plate 21), its mixture of finished details, mottled tones, and areas of flat color, all reminiscent of the sad flower canvases of the late nineteenth-century mystic painter, Odilon Redon, evoke as much as anything in this picture the artist's sense of loss in the death of his wife. From a technical point of view perhaps the most significant aspect of the painting is the way Chagall has organized the many complex details of the large composition into a unified whole through the simplicity of his color patterning. One recalls, noting the large blue semicircle at the left, which serves so well to contain the composition, his brief experiments with Cubism in his earliest Paris days. One is also reminded of a recent remark of Chagall's, that in his use of color he considers himself an abstractionist.

LIFT FOLD FOR ENTIRE PAINTING
DETAIL AT RIGHT →

PLATES 25 & 26

Painted 1933–44

TO MY WIFE

Museum of Modern Art, Paris
51 x 77″

This large canvas, eleven years in the painting, was brought to completion after Bella Chagall's death in the fall of 1944. It is the artist's great tribute to Bella and their happy life together, here, in a manner of speaking, summarized. Into it he brought all the familiar elements—birds, flowers, fiddlers, candlesticks, goats, flying clocks, the houses of Vitebsk. Dominating all are the pair under the wedding canopy, the resplendent nude figure on a red coverlet, and the sorrowing angel at the left. One of the most interesting facets of this complex painting is the bouquet beside the nude. In comparison with the similar bouquet in *Lovers in the Lilacs* (plate 21), its mixture of finished details, mottled tones, and areas of flat color, all reminiscent of the sad flower canvases of the late nineteenth-century mystic painter, Odilon Redon, evoke as much as anything in this picture the artist's sense of loss in the death of his wife. From a technical point of view perhaps the most significant aspect of the painting is the way Chagall has organized the many complex details of the large composition into a unified whole through the simplicity of his color patterning. One recalls, noting the large blue semicircle at the left, which serves so well to contain the composition, his brief experiments with Cubism in his earliest Paris days. One is also reminded of a recent remark of Chagall's, that in his use of color he considers himself an abstractionist.

LIFT FOLD FOR ENTIRE PAINTING
DETAIL AT RIGHT →

PLATE 27

Painted 1945

THE FLYING HORSE

Collection Mr. and Mrs. Harry N. Abrams, New York
41¼ x 28"

Just before World War II Chagall's work became filled with a sense of impending tragedy. His palette and his themes, among them several versions of the Crucifixion and of martyrdom, became increasingly somber. The war itself, the need to move to America and begin work in a strange environment and, more than all else, the sudden and tragic death of his wife in 1944, filled him and his work with acute depression, and weighed down his imagination. Fortunately, in 1942 he was invited by the choreographer Leonide Massine to design the costumes and decor for a new ballet, *Aleko*. This necessitated a trip to Mexico City to work on its production there. The trip gave him, says Chagall, "an extraordinary plastic shock." His colors became more brilliant than ever, his textures more opulent, the rhythm of his composition looser and bolder. Two years later he was commissioned to design a new ballet production of Stravinsky's *Firebird*. The impact on his easel paintings of the two ballet assignments, the new interest and inspiration they afforded him, may be seen in this picture, executed in 1945. Across a dark night sky (a reflection of his own mood, perhaps?) sweeps an imperious cock, sumptuous in color, glittering in surface, so lighting the darkness that apparitions of evil are all but banished (one must look carefully to see the two soldiers' heads just left of the raised arm of the blue figure). Chagall has always insisted there is no symbolism in his work. One still wonders, however, whether this painting is not his picturization—subconscious, perhaps—of the triumphant creative spirit soaring over adversity.

PLATE 28

Painted 1943

JUGGLER

Collection Mrs. Gilbert W. Chapman, New York
43½ × 31″

Chagall, who had found working for and in the theater a gratifying experience when, back in 1919, he had designed settings for the Moscow Art Theater, returned to the field in 1941. He worked on two ballets for the Ballet Theatre Company, and also became preoccupied with the gayest of subjects, the circus. The results were a series of etchings and this painting, in which the familiar characters of earlier Chagall pictures, like the rooster and the bride, are cast in circus roles. Here the great circle of red is no longer just abstract color but a circus ring. His uncle Neuch, the fiddler, is still to be seen, close to the heart of the central figure, as indeed he was close to Chagall's own heart. But perhaps the most startling effect is the old family pendulum clock draped over the juggler's arm. This could be the artist's way of saying with Hamlet, "The time is out of joint," which, for all the surface gaiety of color, it was for Chagall when he painted this picture.

PLATES 29 & 30

Painted 1953

THE ROOFS

Collection of the artist, Vence
90½ x 82⅝"

Chagall discovered Paris, the city, only after he had returned there from his years spent in America during and just after World War II. "In coming back to France, after the American period," he explains, "I was romantically touched by the spectacle of a still fresh, luminous Paris after the terrible years the world had lived through." When he first came to the city from his native Vitebsk before World War I, he was full of nostalgic memories of his childhood. "Even when I looked at Paris"—and he didn't often, in his concern with new aesthetic ideas—"I saw only myself," he had said. Coming back to the city after his years in America, he felt about it as he did of Vitebsk in his youth—it is his old and dear home. In 1952, he embarked on a series of paintings of Parisian landmarks and vistas, which were exhibited at the Galerie Maeght in the summer of 1954. "Tribute to Paris" the show was called. In this picture, the largest in the exhibition, the composition is based on a triple band of broad color masses, black, red, and white, running diagonally upward across the canvas from left to right, opposed by a strong circular movement in the figures. A literal interpretation is inescapable, for clearly the artist is bowing to the things that were important to his development—Bella with a bouquet, Vitebsk with a scholar carrying the Scriptures, and Paris, seen now not just symbolically in the Eiffel Tower, but in a charming landscape impression of Notre Dame, the Seine and its bridges, chestnut trees and little houses not unlike his daughter's home beside the Seine.

ENTIRE PAINTING ABOVE

← LIFT FOLD FOR DETAIL

PLATES 29 & 30

Painted 1953

THE ROOFS

Collection of the artist, Vence
90½ x 82⅝"

Chagall discovered Paris, the city, only after he had returned there from his years spent in America during and just after World War II. "In coming back to France, after the American period," he explains, "I was romantically touched by the spectacle of a still fresh, luminous Paris after the terrible years the world had lived through." When he first came to the city from his native Vitebsk before World War I, he was full of nostalgic memories of his childhood. "Even when I looked at Paris"—and he didn't often, in his concern with new aesthetic ideas—"I saw only myself," he had said. Coming back to the city after his years in America, he felt about it as he did of Vitebsk in his youth—it is his old and dear home. In 1952, he embarked on a series of paintings of Parisian landmarks and vistas, which were exhibited at the Galerie Maeght in the summer of 1954. "Tribute to Paris" the show was called. In this picture, the largest in the exhibition, the composition is based on a triple band of broad color masses, black, red, and white, running diagonally upward across the canvas from left to right, opposed by a strong circular movement in the figures. A literal interpretation is inescapable, for clearly the artist is bowing to the things that were important to his development—Bella with a bouquet, Vitebsk with a scholar carrying the Scriptures, and Paris, seen now not just symbolically in the Eiffel Tower, but in a charming landscape impression of Notre Dame, the Seine and its bridges, chestnut trees and little houses not unlike his daughter's home beside the Seine.

PLATE 31

Painted 1945

THE SPIRIT OF THE TOWN

Museum of Modern Art, Paris
42 x 32″

This painting is typical of the moody, dramatic works Chagall did in the war years. The Crucifixion, which was a recurring theme in canvases of the period, is here given a subjective picture-within-a-picture treatment, sharing the attention of the double-faced artist with the swirling, white spirit figure on the left. The composition is not built on masses of color, as are Chagall's cheerier paintings. Instead, a somber tone is sounded throughout by a general use of blue-gray glazes, and even the few isolated notes that echo the bright colors of his other work—the blue goat, the red tabernacle curtain—are here muted. What holds the painting together structurally is the rhythmic draftsmanship, the curling lines of the white figure echoed in the wisps of smoke over the roof-tops, for instance. Such patterns are always present in his paintings, but frequently overlooked because color dominates. The drawing is simple, yet expressive of the mood of the picture.

PLATE 32

Painted 1953

"CONCORDE"

Collection Philippe Dotremont, Brussels
59 x 41 3/8"

The scene is Paris, as it might appear to someone hovering above the Louvre and looking west. On the Left Bank of the Seine is the Neo-Classic facade of the National Assembly, at a distance behind it the Eiffel Tower standing in the Champ de Mars, and spanning the river from the front of the National Assembly is the Pont de la Concorde. All this is seen in the simplified but nevertheless rather literal aerial landscape in the lower left corner of this painting. But across the bridge on the Right Bank, where the Place de la Concorde should be, we find a table-top still life of fruit and flowers, and in the vast sky above, a tumbling rooster and a pair of lovers locked in embrace. While deeper and darker than Chagall's blue-gray picture of World War II, the blue-black background of this canvas, with only the corona to mark the eclipsed moon, represents not gloom and sorrow but night and romance, and forms a contrasting ground that increases the pitch of vivid yellows, red, blues, and greens.

Painted 1910

THE WEDDING

Collection of the artist, Vence
39⅛ x 74¼"

This painting was done in Chagall's first year in Paris. The theme is one he had employed the year before, in Vitebsk, but here the somber colors of his Russian pictures have been discarded for a more vibrant, high-keyed palette that includes bright yellow, red, and orange. Discarded too is his once literal perspective. Houses have become simple elements of design, and the blue-green triangles in the center foreground, which in his earlier pictures might have been a receding street, now serve chiefly to dramatize, in this procession of many figures, the main characters, bride and bridegroom. The ribbons of color in the sky, a treatment not found in any other major painting by Chagall, suggest the experimental nature of this picture. Evidently they were used to underscore the left to right movement of the procession. A less obvious device to secure the same effect is the rhythmic treatment of the roofs where light areas, punctuated by dark, carry the eye across the canvas to the point where it is stopped by an area of red and a bold black door. The fact that the members of the wedding party cast no shadows on this imaginatively colored foreground gives them the appearance of being free of earthbound gravity and walking on air. Indeed this picture is one of the first examples in Chagall's work of the levitation never absent thereafter.

Plate 33. At right: THE VISION OF THE PROPHET ELI
1931–39. Etching and drypoint, 12½ x 7

Plate 34. JOSEPH, THE SHEPHERD. *Illustration for the Bible 1931–39. Etching, 11⅞ x 9⁵/₁₆″*

Plate 35. CROSSING THE RED SEA. *Illustration for the Bible 1931–39. Etching, 12$^{9}/_{16}$ x 9½"*

Plate 36. BALLET ALEKO. *Setting for Act III. 1942*
Water color, 15¼ x 22½"

Plate 37. BALLET FIREBIRD. *Costume for monster. 1945*
Water color. Collection of the artist, Vence

Plate 39. At right: BALLET FIREBIRD. *Group of Monsters. 1945*
Drawing and water color. Collection of the artist, Vence

Plate 38.
BALLET FIREBIRD
Costume. 1945
Water color
Collection of the artist, Vence

a) From MY LIFE. *1922*
Drypoint, 11 x 8 9/16″

c) From MY LIFE. *1922*
Drypoint, 9 3/4 x 7 7/16″

b) Portion, from LES AMES MORTES. *1923–27*
Etching and drypoint, 14 7/8 x 10 7/8″

Plate 40

e) *From* THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS
1924–25. Drypoint
6⅝ x 4¼"

d) SELF PORTRAIT WITH GOAT. *1922*
Lithograph, 16⅛ x 10⅜"

SELF PORTRAITS

f) SELF PORTRAIT WITH GRIMACE. 1924–25
Etching and aquatint, 14¹¹/₁₆ x 10¾"

Plate 41. GOGOL: LES AMES MORTES. *1923—27*
Etching and drypoint, 14⅞ x 10⅞"

Plate 42. HOMAGE TO GOGOL
Design for theater curtain
1917. Water color, 15½ x 19¾"

Plate 43. GOGOL: LES AMES MORTES. *1923–27*
Etching and drypoint
14⅞ x 10⅞"

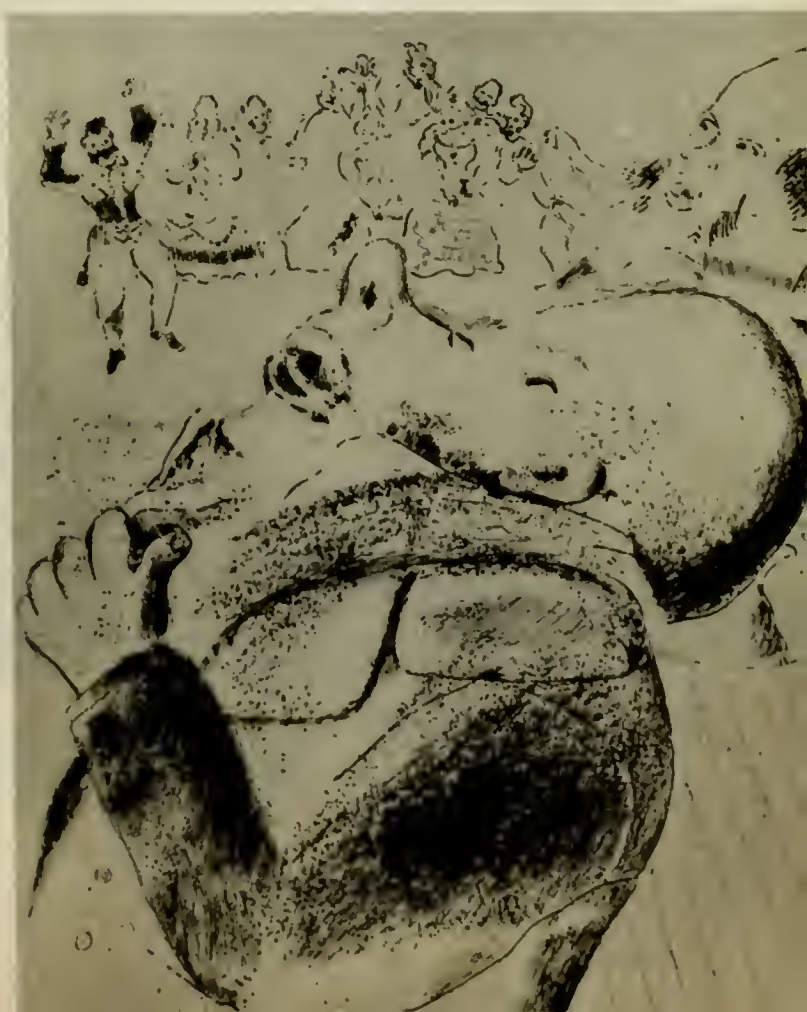

Plate 44. LA FONTAINE: FABLES. *The Lark's Brood and the Farmer*
1927–31. Etching, 11⅝ x 9½"

Plate 45. LA FONTAINE: FABLES. *The Fox and the Stork*
1927–31. Etching, 11½ x 9¼"

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

1889	Born July 7, in Vitebsk, Russia, one of ten children of a fish-shop worker.
1907	After brief art instruction in Vitebsk studied two years in Petrograd.
1910-14	Sent to Paris by a Petrograd patron. Exhibited at Salon des Independants. Heralded by avant-garde poets for "restoring poetry to painting."
1914	First one-man show in offices of review, *Der Sturm,* in Berlin.
1915-17	Married fiancée, Bella, in Vitebsk. Called by army, served as noncombatant in Petrograd. Returns to Vitebsk after revolution. Appointed Minister of Art for Vitebsk, in 1918.
1919	Designs murals, curtains, settings for State Jewish Theater in Moscow. Wrote autobiography, *Ma Vie.*
1922	To Paris via Berlin, where first prints, *Mein Leben,* were published by Paul Cassirer.
1926	First New York one-man show at Reinhardt Galleries.
1941-42	Invited to U.S. by Museum of Modern Art. Worked in Mexico on ballet, *Aleko.*
1944	Death of Bella.
1946	Retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, N.Y.; Art Institute of Chicago.
1947	Returned to Paris.
1948	International Prize for Engraving, 24th Biennale, Venice.
1949	Settled in Vence, worked in ceramics, did two murals for Watergate Theater, London.
1952-55	Series of paintings of Paris, exhibited Galerie Maeght, Paris, 1954. Completed *The Bible* etchings and started plates for *Daphnis and Chloë.*

CHAGALL AS A PRINTMAKER

Although Marc Chagall is known to his public chiefly for his brilliantly colored, fantastic easel paintings, he is a man of exceptional accomplishment in other art forms: murals, theatrical decors, ceramics, drawings, and prints. For sheer volume and technical dexterity the prints (a sampling of them constitutes the black-and-white reproductions in this book) must be ranked with his paintings, and among the most distinguished prints of our time, although only within the past few years have they come to be known.

The first drypoint etchings were done in Berlin, where he stopped off on his way back to Paris after World War I, to illustrate his autobiography, *Mein Leben.* They were published, however, as a portfolio without text, by Paul Cassirer, in 1922. When the autobiography was finally published in Paris in 1931 as *Ma Vie,* it was illustrated with drawings.

All told, Chagall has illustrated more than two dozen books, including his wife's autobiography, *Burning Lights.* His most ambitious book illustrations were done on commission for the great but capricious art impressario, Ambroise Vollard. The first, Gogol's *Dead Souls,* with ninety-three plates, was etched by Chagall between 1923 and 1927, but not published until 1948. Two others, *The Fables of La Fontaine* (100 plates, 1927–30), infinitely richer in tone and texture, and the Bible (105 plates, 1931–40), surely his masterpiece in the print medium, also remained unpublished after Vollard's death in 1940.

On Chagall's return to France after World War II, he resumed work on the Bible, completing it early in 1955 for publication scheduled early in 1956. It was an inspired alliance, joining the great text with the graphic genius of a man whose life and art have been rooted in it since his early youth. In 1955, after two trips to Greece, Chagall also set to work on illustrations for the classic idyll, *Daphnis and Chloë.*

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ABOUT CHAGALL

A. EFROSS and J. TUGENHOLD, *Die Kunst Marc Chagalls.* Potsdam, G. Kiepenheuer, 1921 (Translated from the Russian edition published in Moscow in 1918. The earliest monograph on Chagall, it contains photographs of early paintings which are little known and rarely reproduced.)

MARC CHAGALL, *Ma vie.* Paris, Stock, 1931 (A series of autobiographical sketches written in Russian and finished c. 1922, here translated into French by Bella Chagall. They were published in Yiddish in the New York monthly *Die Zukunft,* March-June 1925; excerpts can be found in *View* [N.Y.], January 1946, and *Commentary* [N.Y.], April 1946.)

RAISSA MARITAIN, *Marc Chagall.* New York, Editions Maison Française, 1943

LIONELLO VENTURI, *Marc Chagall.* New York, Pierre Matisse Editions, 1945

JAMES JOHNSON SWEENEY, *Marc Chagall.* New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1946

ISAAC KLOOMOK, *Marc Chagall: His Life and Work.* New York, Philosophical Library, 1951.

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MARC CHAGALL

TEXT BY EMILY GENAUER

Art Critic and Editor, The New York Herald-Tribune

MARC CHAGALL's art has earned for him a special place in the hearts of art-lovers. Unashamedly, while around him painting became intellectualized, abstract, or rawly emotional, Chagall has continued to paint with the true and touching naiveté of an unusually wise and sensitive child—as though everything that happens or has happened to him is extremely rare and extremely precious, and as though he alone has the key to glittering secrets. Yet Chagall by no means has neglected the tremendous renaissance of modern art, and he could not possibly have developed his heady art without the lessons of Cubism, Expressionism, abstract painting, and Surrealism. But seemingly he could not be happy with any discipline which kept him from painting important personal events and memories; which kept him from giving semblance to stories that haunted his mind—the Bible, *Lost Souls,* La Fontaine's *Fables.* Few modern artists have dared to work the vein of "storytelling" art; Chagall has, and he has shown how important this most ancient kind of painting still is.

TITLES NOW READY

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